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Mrs Linda Rodham
Headteacher
Wellfield Community School – A Specialist Maths and Computing College
North Road
East Wingate
County Durham
TS28 5AX

Dear Mrs Rodham

**Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Wellfield Community School
– A Specialist Maths and Computing College**

Following my visit to your school with Barbara Comiskey, Her Majesty's Inspector, on 05 March 2013 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in September 2012. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, and the Director of Children's Services for Durham.

Yours sincerely

Joan Hewitt

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2012

- Improve the quality of teaching to be consistently good or better by:
 - rapidly eliminating all inadequate teaching
 - improving the quality of all teaching to be at least good by the end of the school year
 - sharing the good practice that exists in the school so that weaker teachers learn from the most successful practitioners
 - ensuring that all teachers have high expectations of what students can do and that they require them to work hard in lessons
 - improving teachers' use of assessment information and assessment methods during lessons so that all students are able to make good progress
 - ensuring that teachers provide more frequent opportunities for active and independent learning so that students learn at their own best rate
 - ensuring that the planning, resources and support provided for students who have special educational needs are tailored to match their capabilities and specific needs so that they enjoy learning and make the same progress as their peers
 - continuing to secure consistently good behaviour in lessons through close monitoring of students' views on learning in different subjects and taking action where it is needed.

- Raise students' attainment and achievement, especially in English and mathematics by:
 - accelerating progress in Key Stage 3 so that students are well prepared for the challenges of GCSE work
 - ensuring that work in these subjects is well matched to the needs of individuals in all classes, so that they make the progress of which they are capable and are not held back by expectations that are too low.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - developing the skills and expertise of middle leaders to robustly and accurately monitor the performance of staff and students in their departments and take prompt and effective action to tackle weaknesses
 - identifying, analysing and collating the best practice in departments from which to develop consistent good practice
 - improving governors' first-hand knowledge of the school so they are able to hold it more fully to account and play a more effective role in the school's strategic development.

- Raise the attendance of the large groups of persistent absentees by continuing to develop ways of engaging these students in successful and enjoyable learning.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 05 March 2013

Evidence

The inspectors met with the headteacher and senior leaders, middle leaders and members of support staff. They also met a group of students, the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors looked at samples of students' work and the school's documents including progress and attendance information. One inspector observed lessons accompanied by senior leaders. Inspectors concentrated on improvements in teaching overall and especially in mathematics and English. They also looked closely at the work the school has been doing to improve attendance.

Context

The school continues to explore the possibility of becoming an academy. A new Chair of the Governing Body has been appointed. The first phase of the new building is on track to be completed in September 2013. Key teaching appointments have been made to the mathematics and religious education departments. These teachers are due to take up their posts in April. A few members of staff have been made redundant as part of the school's long-term staffing plan.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The headteacher has maintained a tenacious focus on improving the quality of teaching. She is energetically supported by senior leaders and the governing body. The remaining pockets of inadequate teaching are being dealt with firmly and systematically.

Senior and middle leaders are using effective programmes to help teachers improve their work. There are clear examples of teachers' work in the classroom improving as a result of coaching and observing good teaching. When senior leaders give teachers feedback about the quality of their work they are clear in pinpointing strengths and equally plain when they are explaining how it could be improved.

Middle leaders are developing approaches to using the school's data to quickly spot where students are under-achieving and take effective action to get them back on track. Sometimes the analysis of this data is still not sharp enough to highlight the complex needs of some groups of students, particularly disadvantaged students who also need extra help in lessons.

The new Chair of the Governing Body has embraced her responsibilities with gusto and this has helped to reinvigorate other governors. They are now regularly making purposeful visits to the school and using the information to support and challenge senior and middle leaders. For example, governors have met with groups of students to talk about their work. The governors used what they learned to ask for clearer

information about how these students' needs were being met and, crucially, how success was being monitored.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- For most students, achievement is improving because more lessons are helping them to be more active and figure out problems for themselves. More students in Year 11 are making the progress in line with that expected nationally. Students' progress in Key Stage 3 is also beginning to speed up. Improvements have been faster in mathematics than in English. Students say most teachers now expect them to work harder but it is not the same right across the school.
- Students are usually keen to answer questions but often lack the confidence to give more than one- or two-word answers. This is especially true when teachers do not give them enough time to think and discuss what they need to say. Teachers' marking is improving and there are some good examples of helpful comments which explain clearly how work can be improved. The amount of times when books are not marked regularly or helpfully has reduced.
- Students are developing better attitudes to learning, and behaviour in class has improved. Students report that there is less 'back-chat' and they approve of the stricter, 'consequences' system teachers use to manage any behaviour that falls below expectations. Consequently, the atmosphere in the school is calm and learning usually moves along smoothly.
- Teachers are using the new, 'flight paths' to plan lessons to meet the needs of students with different abilities. Some are using this very well indeed. For example, a group of Year 9 students with a wide range of abilities made good progress when they were finding out how the lives of Jews changed in Germany during the Second World War. This was because the teacher had given them tasks that were exactly right for them. However, this effective approach is not fully understood and used by all teachers so sometimes students still do the same task at the same time. This does not stretch the most-able and leaves the least-able behind.
- Attendance has greatly improved because staff have worked hard in making sure students and their families understand why regular attendance is vital in students making good progress. The school's own data shows attendance is now in line with the national average. The numbers of students who regularly struggle to attend school has reduced because staff have spent time helping them to overcome significant problems. There is still work to be done in this area as gaps remain in the attendance of some groups of students, such as those who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- While achievement overall has improved for all groups of students, the gap between the progress made by some groups is sometimes too wide. For example, students who have extra help in class and those who have extra

funding through the pupil premium do not always make as much progress as other groups.

- Teachers have not had enough help in how to teach students who need extra help in lessons. Consequently, they do not always expect enough from these students. Leaders have introduced extra sessions to help students improve their reading and writing but this is not sufficient to make a big difference quickly enough.

External support

The local authority continues to offer effective support. A clear example can be seen in the work officers have done in reviewing the quality of teachers' marking. This has supported middle leaders in helping teachers to improve the quality of their marking.